

Flu Season On The Horizon What We Need To Know

What Is The Flu?

Influenza (flu) is a contagious illness caused by influenza viruses that attack the respiratory tract in humans. The flu usually comes on suddenly with symptoms including fever (usually high), headache, extreme fatigue, body aches, cough, and sometimes sore throat and stuffy nose. The common cold, on the other hand, seldom produces fever, headache, and severe aches or fatigue.

Why Get Vaccinated Against The Flu?

Influenza is a serious disease, and people of any age can get it. Serious complications such as pneumonia are common in people at high risk. In an average year, the flu causes 36,000 deaths (mostly among those aged 65 or older) and more than 200,000 hospitalizations in the United States. The “flu season” in this country usually spans November through April. During this time, flu viruses are circulating in the population, generally spread by respiratory droplets formed by coughing and sneezing.



Read the Story, Get TEMPO Credit!

Read the following Q&A story, take the quiz, and send your answers with your name and Social Security “last four” to Cyndi Harrison (mail stop P2-PCA) for 1 hour of TEMPO credit.

What Kinds Of Flu Vaccines Are Available?

Two types of vaccines are available. The “flu shot” contains killed flu virus and is given with a needle, usually in the arm. The flu shot is approved for use among people over 6 months old, including healthy people and those with chronic medical conditions such as diabetes and heart disease. The other kind of vaccine is the “nasal-spray flu vaccine” approved in 2003. This vaccine contains weakened live flu viruses and is given by nasal sprayer. It is approved for use only among healthy people between the ages of 5 and 49.

How Do Flu Vaccines Work?

Both types of vaccine provoke the body’s immune system to produce antibodies that provide protection against influenza virus.

Who Is At High Risk For Complications From The Flu?

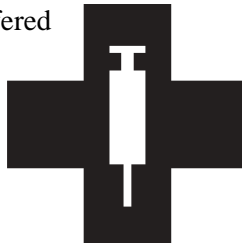
- People 65 and older.
- People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities.
- Adults and children 6 months and older with chronic heart or lung conditions, including asthma.
- Adults and children 6 months and older who needed regular medical care or were hospitalized during the previous year because of a metabolic disease like diabetes, kidney disease or weakened immune system (including problems caused by medicines and by infection with the AIDS virus, HIV).
- Children 6 months to 18 years of age who are on long-term aspirin therapy (Children given aspirin while they have influenza are at risk of a severe complication called Reye’s syndrome.)
- Women who will be pregnant during the influenza season.
- All children 6-23 months of age.
- People with any condition that can compromise respiratory function, that is, conditions that make it hard to breathe or swallow, such as brain injury or disease, spinal cord injuries, seizure disorders and other nerve and muscle disorders.
- People 50-64 who have one or more medical conditions that place them at risk for serious flu complications (about one-third of this age group in the U.S.)

Should Anybody Who Isn't High-Risk Get A Shot?

Yes - any person in close contact with someone in a high-risk group, such as health care workers, caretakers of children between six and 23 months old, and close contacts of people 65 and older.

When Should I Get A Flu Shot?

Beginning each September, the flu shot should be offered to people at high risk when they are seen by health-care providers. The best time to get vaccinated is from October through November. Flu in the United States usually peaks between late December and early March. A late vaccination is better than none - even if flu is already present in your community.



Who Should Not Be Vaccinated?

- People who have a severe allergy to chicken eggs (eggs are used in vaccine production).
- People who have had a severe reaction to a flu shot in the past.
- People who developed the neurological condition Guillain-Barre syndrome after a previous flu shot.
- Children less than 6 months old.
- People who currently have a moderate or severe illness with a fever. These people should wait until recovered to get a flu shot.
- If you have any questions about whether you should have a flu shot, talk to your health-care provider.

Does Flu Vaccine Work Right Away?

NO, it takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop and provide protection against influenza viruses. That is why it's a good idea to get vaccinated early in the fall before the flu season really gets under way.

Can I Get The Flu Even Though I Got A Flu Shot This Year?

Yes. We've all heard of cases of "I got the shot and still got the flu!" That's because the shot's ability to protect you depends on two things:

- 1 The age and health status of the person getting the vaccine.
- 2 The similarity or "match" between the virus strains in the vaccine and those currently circulating in the community.

Nonetheless, your chances of getting the flu are much lower if you've had the vaccine.

Why Do I Need To Get Vaccinated Against The Flu Every Year?

Flu viruses change from year to year. That means you can get the flu more than once during your life. Immunity built up by infection by one virus may not protect you against a new virus strain. Also, a vaccine

made against flu viruses known to be circulating last year may not protect against strains circulating this year. Further, even if similar strains are circulating, immunity provoked by last year's shot will have declined during the year after you were vaccinated.

What Is The "Bird Flu" I've Heard About In The News?

Bird flu is caused by viruses found in birds worldwide. Although they usually doesn't make birds sick, these viruses are very contagious among them and can cause severe illness and death in some domesticated birds, including chickens, ducks and turkeys. In recent Asian outbreaks, millions of birds either died or were destroyed to stop spread of the disease. Bird flu viruses don't usually infect humans, but some human cases and deaths were reported during these outbreaks. Unlike human influenza, bird flu apparently does not pass easily from person to person. Because viruses are always changing, however, public health officials are planning for the possibility that bird flu could pose a serious threat to human populations.

Sources: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and VA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention

**Occupational Health
will be providing
Flu Vaccinations
for this year.
Watch for Flyers and
Bulletins on times/
locations.**

Flu Quiz for 1 hour of TEMPO Credit

Send your answers with your name and Social Security “last four” to Cyndi Harrison (mail stop P2-PCA), or bring to Bldg. 101, Rm. 120, for 1 hour of TEMPO credit.

Your Name _____ Social Security Last four _____

Please circle the correct answer for the five questions.

1. Which of the following is true?
 - a. Influenza is a severe form of the common cold.
 - b. Diarrhea and vomiting are the most common influenza symptoms.
 - c. Influenza causes about 36,000 deaths each year in the United States.
 - d. Influenza seldom produces symptoms of fever, headache, or extreme fatigue.
2. Who in the following list should get a flu shot?
 - a. People 65 and older.
 - b. Women who will be pregnant during the influenza season.
 - c. People who currently are ill with a fever and think they may have the flu.
 - d. All of the above.
 - e. Both “a” and “b.”
3. Who in the following list should **not** get a flu shot?
 - a. People who have a severe allergy to eggs.
 - b. Children 6-23 months old.
 - c. Adults with chronic heart or lung conditions such as asthma.
 - d. Both “a” and “c.”
4. Which of the following is true?
 - a. It takes about two weeks after vaccination for the flu shot to provide protection.
 - b. You only need to get a flu shot every five years, when antibody levels decline.
 - c. You can only get the flu once during your lifetime.
 - d. All of the above.
5. Which of the following is true?
 - a. There were no human cases during recent bird flu outbreaks in Asia in which millions of birds died or were destroyed to stop spread of the disease.
 - b. Bird flu viruses pass easily from one person to another.
 - c. Bird flu viruses pass easily from one chicken to another.
 - d. Viruses are always changing, so bird flu has the potential to become a more serious threat to public health.
 - e. All of the above.
 - f. Both “c” and “d” are true.